

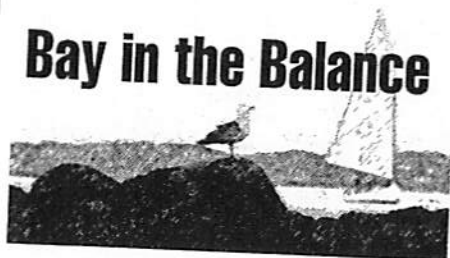
Bay in the Balance

This week we offer the final installment of our 10-part Bay in the Balance series.

The series, researched and written by Debora Babin Katz (Thank you Debora!), was meant to inform, to educate, to illuminate. It was necessarily long because the subject is necessarily comprehensive.

Duxbury Bay is our greatest natural treasure. It is the reason so many of us are here. Yet it is the very attraction of this treasure that so imperils it, showing us that nothing, even the expansive waters of this rich resource, is impervious to the pressures of growth.

Bay in the Balance



In the early 1970s, the late Dr. Lance Bennett led a successful charge to provide Duxbury with more open space and more protection for its drinking water. His persua-

sive arguments prompted Duxbury voters to acquire hundreds of acres of conservation land and took dead aim at the suburban sprawl that was enveloping so many of Boston's bedrooms. It was those actions, taken more than 30 years ago, that allow us to attach the words "semi rural" when describing Duxbury today. The work that Dr. Bennett began is not yet done, but we have made a magnificent start. Now it is time to turn east.

The question — is Duxbury getting too big for Duxbury Bay? —underscores the problems of a new kind of sprawl, an aqua sprawl, we'll call it, which threatens every part of the bay and, which if left unchecked, will surely destroy our most prized possession.

Consider these facts: Pollution, though less prevalent than in the '70s, is still a common occurrence along certain shores after a heavy rain. Boat traffic, particularly on weekends, is now so thick that one wonders if we'll soon need aqua traffic lights. Today, we have as many as 600 boats a day plying bay waters. The waiting list for deep-water moorings is 12 to 15 years. In 1981, we had 151 moorings on the bay.

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381. Howland's Landing, once considered a true backwater for mooring space, now has a waiting list.

Ten years ago, there was no aquaculture in Duxbury Bay. Last year the town issued seven oyster grants to cultivate 14.5 acres. This year, 16 grants were issued for 33 acres. And on its goes. SUV traffic continues to expand on Duxbury Beach, forcing the harbor master on numerous occasions to close crossovers to additional traffic. Meanwhile shorebird populations continue to decline at dramatic rates.

Private piers continue to be built. We had thought there were 70. Now, thanks to the work of a new study committee on local piers, we know there are 108, with more on the drawing board. The Duxbury Bay Maritime School, wildly successful since its inception five years ago, has plans to grow larger. Bayside Marine, an institution in Duxbury for more than half a century, has too little space for its customer base.

And all this is just Duxbury. What happens in Kingston and Plymouth will surely contribute to the growing sprawl. Development at Cordage Park alone could have a tremendous impact on Duxbury Bay.

In 1970, under the leadership of Dr. Bennett and others, we bought up land to protect ourselves. What do we now, for we know we cannot buy up water?

This time the conundrum is far more complex, and frankly, so are the politics and the potential for conflict. We are going to have to learn to live with limits, be the subject dogs on the beach, shellfish licenses, piers, aquaculture grants, moorings or overland beach traffic. We are going to need a larger presence from the harbor master's office and we'll probably need to spend more money on enforcement. In fact, we're going to have to spend a lot more money on all kinds of things that affect the bay and the beach. And we're going to have to pay close attention to the work of the Duxbury Bay Management Committee, created last spring for the express purpose of studying the entire bay issue.

Finding the best ways to protect our most valued natural resource seems a Herculean task, yet it is a task we must undertake. To do otherwise would be ruinous.